

**Office of the Secretary of Education
Interim Report July 2014 – November 2014
Standards of Learning Innovation Committee
Executive Summary**



Executive Summary

Legislation in the 2014 General Assembly Session established the Standards of Learning Innovation Committee (the Committee), with a charge to look broadly at reforming Virginia's current system and to think creatively about the future of the Standards of Learning (SOL), assessments, and accountability. This set of twelve recommendations is a result of the Committee's initial work during the first four months. Additional recommendations will be forthcoming over the next two years of the Committee's term.

Committee's Vision Statement

The Standards of Learning Innovation Committee is guided by a commitment to inspire, engage, and personalize learning for every student in the Commonwealth. The Committee's focus is to ensure Virginia has an accountability system that is fair, balanced, and supportive of this vision as the Commonwealth prepares our students for success beyond their high school years.

Committee's Beliefs

- **Accountability plays a crucial role in ensuring educational success.**
- **The current accountability and assessment systems have supported greater consistency in teaching the core curriculum and have improved student performance over time.**
- **Students need and deserve an education that capitalizes on their curiosity and natural desire to learn so that each student is prepared for responsible citizenship and success in the world beyond school.**
- **Recruiting and retaining world-class educators is critical to providing students with a high quality education that instills in them a love of learning and prepares them for success beyond school.**
- **Improvements to Virginia's assessment and accountability systems, including potential further reductions in state-mandated testing, provide the opportunity to promote innovative and creative teaching that enhances student learning but retains the benefits of accountability.**

Statements of Principle and Interim Recommendations

The following twelve recommendations, organized under four statements of principle, represent initial work of the Committee. Work will continue in 2015 and beyond, and other recommendations will be forthcoming.

Statement of Principle I: The state accountability system should acknowledge the progress of schools toward meeting the accreditation benchmarks and should recognize individual student growth.

Five Interim Recommendations correspond with Principle I:

1. Recommend that the Board of Education and the General Assembly revise the Standards of Accreditation to add accreditation ratings which 1) recognize the progress of schools that do not meet the accreditation benchmarks but have significantly improved their pass rates, and which 2) recognize schools that did not meet accreditation benchmarks but have demonstrated significant growth for the majority of students. For example, schools that have not met the 70% or 75% pass rate benchmark required for full accreditation but have demonstrated significant improvement in their pass rates might be rated as “provisionally accredited—significant progress demonstrated.” Schools that have not improved their overall pass rates but have demonstrated growth on the statewide reading and/or mathematics tests for a majority of their students might receive a rating of: “provisionally accredited—significant student growth.” The Board of Education should develop guidelines to ensure clarity and consistency.
2. Recommend that the General Assembly and the Board of Education add to the Standards of Accreditation an appeals process for schools that are 1) not fully accredited, 2) do not demonstrate significant improvement in their pass rates, and 3) do not demonstrate significant growth on the state assessments for their students. Such an appeals process would allow schools that do not achieve one of these three ratings but meet other criteria as defined by the Board of Education to appeal their rating. The Board of Education should develop guidelines on eligible schools and acceptable evidence.
3. Recommend that Board of Education and the General Assembly revise the Standards of Accreditation to provide flexibility in how often schools are accredited. Schools might be accredited annually, every three years, or every five years based on their past accreditation status. Schools that do not achieve full accreditation would be permitted to request that their accreditation rating be recalculated the following year. Pass rates on the state-mandated tests would continue to be posted annually on the School Performance Report Card.
4. Recommend that the Governor and the General Assembly support funding to provide students with opportunities for on demand testing, additional opportunities for retests, and additional opportunities to demonstrate growth from the beginning of the school

year to the end. This effort may include continued movement toward a Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) format.

5. Recommend that the Governor and the General Assembly support funding to provide opportunities for students in elementary and middle school levels who have failed an SOL test but came close to meeting the benchmark, to retake the test during the same test administration. Such opportunities would be provided as an option for students and parents; students would not be required to retake a failed test.

Statement of Principle II: Alternative opportunities for students to demonstrate college and career readiness in order to meet graduation requirements should be provided. Doing so will foster innovation and creativity in the classroom and better align students' skills with workforce needs.

Two Interim Recommendations correspond with Principle 2:

6. Recommend that the Governor and the General Assembly support legislation and funding to provide incentives for local school divisions to 1) identify alternative ways for students to accrue standard credits outside of the traditional seat time requirements and 2) to identify additional opportunities to earn verified credits beyond passing an end-of-course SOL test or a board-approved substitute test. Recommend that the Board of Education establish guidelines to ensure that students learn the content and skills included in the Standards of Learning.
7. Recommend that the Board of Education expand the availability of locally awarded verified credits to students in subjects where SOL tests are not mandated by federal requirements. School divisions would be permitted to award verified credits to any student who has demonstrated proficiency in the content through an alternative assessment.

Statement of Principle III: As the Standards of Learning are revised, they should reflect the nature and complexity of the knowledge and skills needed for students to participate in the global community. The implementation timeline should allow sufficient time for the incorporation of new content and skills into the curriculum before their inclusion in the state tests used for accountability.

Three Interim Recommendations correspond with Principle 3:

8. Recommend that the Board of Education consider revisions to the Standards of Learning that give attention to the skills deemed important for success in college, career, and citizenship. Such a focus suggests that content standards will be fewer and deeper and will reflect increased emphasis on essential skills in areas such as communication, problem solving, and critical and creative thinking at the high levels needed for success beyond school. The revision process for the Standards of Learning should also include opportunities for input from business, institutes of higher education, and citizens to ensure that the revised standards include the knowledge and skills that are most important and relevant to students' future success.

9. Recommend that to the Board of Education that the revision schedule for the Standards of Learning be structured so that school divisions have sufficient time to incorporate new content and skills into the curriculum before it is included on the state assessments.
10. Recommend that the Board of Education and the Department of Education consider the inclusion of interdisciplinary assessments as new tests measuring the revised Standards of Learning are developed.

Statement of Principle IV: The state accountability system should allow for a balance between alternative assessments and the existing assessments that comprise the state assessment system, allowing for flexibility within school districts.

Two Interim Recommendations correspond with principle 4:

11. Recommend that the Governor and General Assembly support funding for initiatives at the local level that demonstrate the use of effective authentic alternative measures of student growth and achievement. Funding should be included for professional development and for increased capacity at the Virginia Department of Education in order to provide technical assistance to local school divisions and should provide opportunities for collaboration between local school divisions and Virginia's institutes of higher education.
12. Recommend that the Board of Education and the Department of Education identify and disseminate best practices in the use of authentic and/or alternative assessments by local school divisions.